

Public to have say

Lake commissioners set hearings for possible sales tax increase

John Arthur Hutchison

JHutchison@News-Herald.com

Twitter: newsheraldjah

Lake County commissioners have taken the first step toward consideration to increase the county's sale tax rate.

Commissioners are required by state law to conduct two public hearings if they want to raise the rate and they recently set the dates for 2 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m. Jan. 17.

Both public hearings are scheduled to take place in the commissioners' chambers on the fourth floor of the county administration building, 105 Main St., Painesville.

Any person may attend either hearing and express his or her views regarding the matter under consideration.

Written comments can be submitted to the commissioners at the address listed for the hearing.

Commissioners said the hearing times were scheduled during the day because they typically haven't attracted much of a crowd in the evenings.

"In 2002, when we raised the water and sewer rates, we had them at night on the east and west end," Commissioner Daniel P. Troy said.

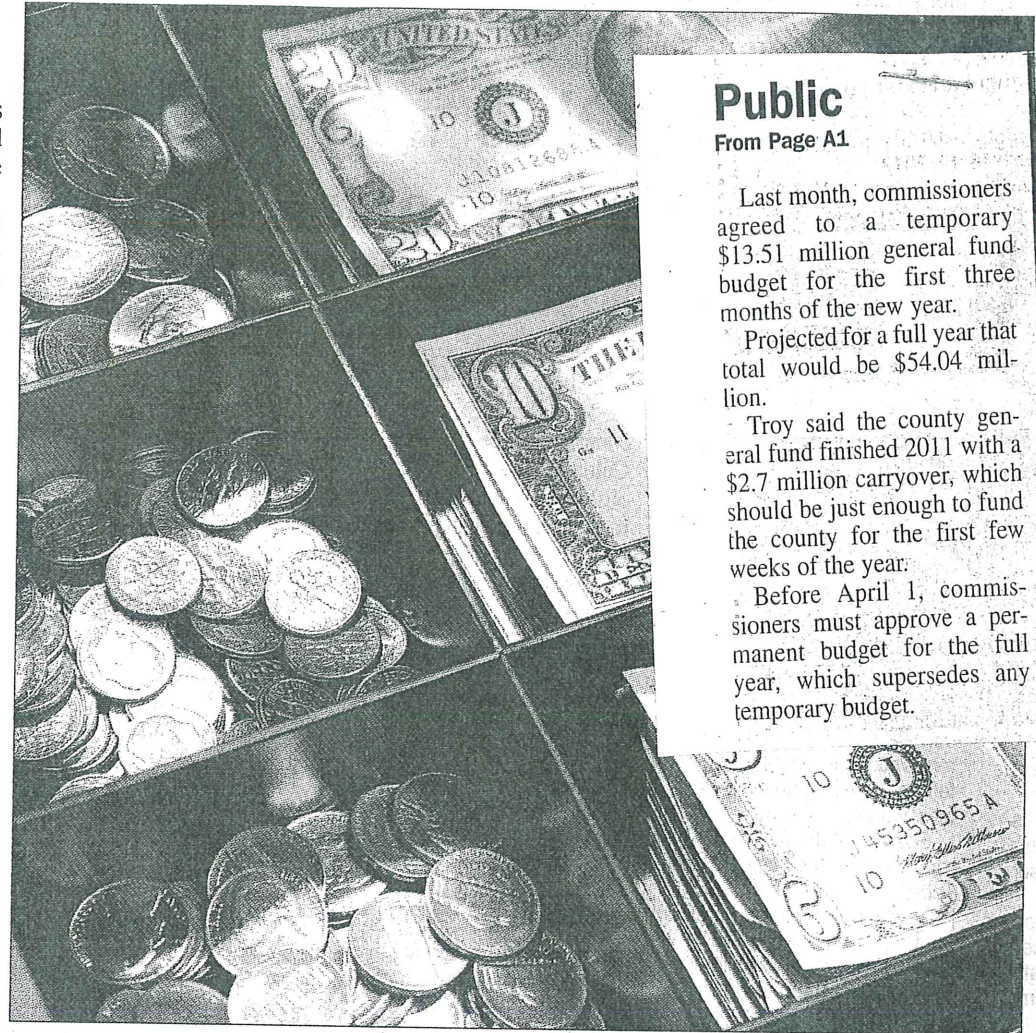
"We had four people show up for both hearings and three were the same people."

Troy was asked if these hearings might attract more attention.

"I would have thought a 27 percent increase in water and sewer rates would have gotten more attention," he said.

Commissioner Raymond E. Sines said anyone who can't attend the hearings or doesn't wish to submit written comments can call the commissioners directly if they wish to voice concerns or opinions.

The sales tax rate in Lake County is 6.25 percent, of which the county receives 0.50 percent and Laketrans receives 0.25 per-



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Last month, commissioners agreed to a temporary \$13.51 million general fund budget for the first three months of the new year.

Projected for a full year that total would be \$54.04 million.

Troy said the county general fund finished 2011 with a \$2.7 million carryover, which should be just enough to fund the county for the first few weeks of the year.

Before April 1, commissioners must approve a permanent budget for the full year, which supersedes any temporary budget.

cent. The state of Ohio receives 5.5 percent.

Lake County's total rate is among the lowest in the state and is lower than neighboring Geauga (6.5 percent), Ashtabula (6.5 percent) and Cuyahoga (7.75 percent) counties.

To raise the sales tax would require commissioners to pass a resolution with the two prior public hearings.

For an option to do so as an emergency measure, commissioners would need a unanimous vote.

Commissioners also could vote unanimously or by a 2-1 margin to place an issue on the countywide ballot.

A decision could ultimately be made not to raise the sales tax

rate, so conducting public hearings doesn't necessarily mean an increase will happen.

Troy said state law allows the sales tax to be increased by increments of 0.25 percent.

He said commissioners continue to discuss exactly how much they may look to increase the rate.

State law allows a county to impose up to 1.5 percent, so the commissioners have a full percentage point with which to work.

However, it's more likely the rate would be increased by 0.25 or 0.50 percent.

"We're not going to do a full percent," Troy said.

A sales tax raise of 0.25 percent generates 25 cents for every

\$100 in taxable dollars spent and that could potentially generate an additional \$7 million annually in revenue for the county.

Part of the reason a sales tax increase could happen is because the county continues to operate on smaller budgets.

The county's budget keeps shrinking because of cuts from the state, smaller revenue from county investments, less funding from property taxes and a struggling economy that has left sales tax revenues flat.

Commissioners approved a \$54.83 million budget in 2011, down from \$58.54 million in 2010.

In 2009, they approved a budget of \$61 million.

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